

January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006

Cecil Joseph esq.  
Vice-President  
Dominica Labour Party (DLP)  
Roseau  
Commonwealth of Dominica

Dear Mr. Joseph:

In light of the recent resignation of the Party's President, I am directing this letter to you for your attention.

This is to advise that I hereby formally stand down as General Secretary of the Dominica Labour Party with immediate effect.

It is now clear to me after nine or so months of deep inquiry that since my election to the post of General Secretary of the Party the Party's top leadership had set about to frustrate all the attempts I would make to carry out the tasks normally carried out by a General Secretary, including to co-ordinate the building of the Party as an organization.

On the one hand, the level of disrespect and animosity directed at me in public was deliberate, planned and calculated. I am sure you would recall the series of opportunistic salvos fired by Astaphan at my capacity to lead and my readiness to represent.

You would also remember Matthew Walter's idiotic castigation of me as a traitor dressed in the Party's clothing who, in fact, was working on the side of the Opposition.

And, who can forget the notorious meeting in the Portsmouth market when my presentation was disrupted by heckling orchestrated by elements of the Party's leadership, and following which the Party's Political Leader and Deputy Leader without consulting constituents went on quite shamelessly to cunningly identify their choice for the Portsmouth constituency.

But the greatest disrespect shown to the post of Party General Secretary and, quite obviously, to me personally was the Political Leader's wanton disregard of my opinion on Party matters. The Party's constitution stipulates that the Political

Leader is to carry out his duties after consultation with the Deputy Political leader and the General Secretary. Yet, during my 22-month tenure of the office not once did the Political Leader see it fit to seek my opinion on any matter whatsoever.

Instead, critical Party decisions were made in secret meetings to which key members of the Party's Executive, including the General Secretary, were not invited. And quite unusually, the Party was time and again represented abroad by handpicked loyalists of the Political Leader who were not on the Party's Executive, rather than by its International Secretary.

I needed nothing more to step down. But elections were on the horizon. So, I shrugged aside my personal concerns. I swallowed my immense pride. And I put Party first. I believed rightly or wrongly that standing down at that time might have created an impression of confusion and disunity within our ranks and would have thereby played into the hands of the Opposition. My problem was with the Party's leadership, not with the rank-and-file members and supporters. Leaders have come. And leaders have gone. But the Party goes on. I would not expose the Party to political fall-out for sins committed by its leaders. Many, especially among the Opposition, saw this as cowardice. I prefer to call it a principled position. Time will tell.

Since the May elections and the taking of power by its leaders, things have got worse for the Party, instead of better. Before the elections leaders proclaimed themselves to be servants of the people. Now, with power in their hands, leaders are now masters of the people. Rank-and-file members and supporters without whose loyalty, sacrifice and hard work victory at the polls would not have been possible, have been given no role whatsoever in the running of the country. And the Party as an organisation with structures and rules of conduct has for all practical purposes come to a stop.

The logic is as transparent as it can be. In the eyes of its leaders the political party exists essentially to put its leaders in government and keep them there from election to election.

Therefore, the political party is conceived, kept alive, and promoted as an election machine with limited objectives, rather than as an organization of people guided by a clear political line and driven by well-defined strategies in pursuit of concrete goals, aims and objectives.

Hence, on the morning of an election victory the political party is thought for the time being to have outlined the main purpose of its existence, namely, to put its leaders in power. Governing is believed to be the order of the day. And this is taken to mean four related sets of activities: convening parliament to enact legislation; meeting in Cabinet to take policy decisions; formulation of policy by trusted technocrats; and implementation of public policy by the public service.

In effect, Ministers of government and members of parliament become everything. The political party is nothing. Government disconnects from its Party. The Party's Constitution goes into limbo. Party-building goes into recess. The link between the rank-and-file members and supporters and the Party by which Party leaders in government are kept abreast of the particular needs of constituents and are informed of the people's views on prevailing issues of national importance: that vital link is now broken.

To put it in a word: Once in government Party leaders whether in Cabinet or on the backbenches place absolute faith in themselves as the original source of wisdom as to how to solve the pressing problems confronting the nation. They know what is best for the people. They know it better than the people themselves. So neither the Party apparatus as a go-between, nor the grass roots directly, are brought into the process of government decision-making. Regular reporting to constituents is treated as treason. Leaders of government take center stage. And the Party goes into the background, to be called upon to do damage control among the dissatisfied and discontented when Government passes unpopular measures.

In this relation between government and ruling party, and between ruling party and the masses, where is the practice of genuinely representative democracy? Where is the participation by the people? Where is the empowerment of the grassroots? Who are the servants and who, the masters?

Quite obviously, a well organized Party must be an even greater burden on a Political Leader who believes his mission to be divine. Why set up mechanisms for consultation when answers will come through divine intervention? Why draw on knowledge from the rank-and-file when a small clique of compliant disciples will do?

It seems to me that the Dominica Labour Party of today has abandoned the ideals and mission of its founding fathers and mothers. And as an organization it is a mere shell of what it was in the last days of the Pierre Charles regime. Where are

the links with the people? Where are the basic units put in place, first, by Mike and then by Rosie, after these units had faded into oblivion during the Party's 20-year drift across the political wilderness? Where are the zonal co-ordinators set up by Pierro to guide, co-ordinate and keep alive the activities of those units? Where is the Management Committee set up by Pierro that met regularly to exchange ideas on the major issues facing the country and on the way forward? Where are the various committees set up by Pierro at the St. Joseph National Council Meeting to rebuild the Party? Where is the programme of political education to raise the consciousness of Party members and supporters and steer them clear of the politics of "Jesus versus Barabas?"

What is the Party's view of the world unfolding around us? What is its political line? When will the Executive Committee function once more as a forum for the fearless ventilation of views independent of those of the Political Leader. Where is the Party's Youth Arm, now that the period of red-hot barbecuing has passed? Where is the Women's Arm? When will the Party's International Secretary rather than tongue-tied chambermaids take charge of the Party's overseas responsibilities? When will the Party Treasurer regain responsibility for Party finances? Where are our regional and international fraternal parties? Above all, when will members and supporters to whom these omissions and commissions are an open secret stand up and fight for the life of their Party?

What passes for the Dominica Labour Party now is no more than a hero followed by a crowd. I have long parted ways with the politics of hero worship and placed faith in the capacity of people, properly guided, to do for themselves through sacrifice and hard work what Heroes and Messiahs promise them on a silver platter. The verdict of history is that once the hero is unmasked and the gloss fades, the crowd, unless organized, will unceremoniously evaporate.

The truth is that nothing has happened during my tenure as General Secretary to convince me now that the present leadership is serious about re-building the Party. Or, for that matter, of organizing its members and supporters or the people as a whole in any other way. Nor is the Party serious about giving the people a meaningful role in the country's governance and development. To promote Party-building or a place for the Party in national decision-making is to threaten the Party's present crop of leaders.

Today, you diss the rank-and-file members and supporters of the Party. Tomorrow, you will diss all the people. I cannot in all honesty continue to

associate with leaders of such thinking. I trust that my continued commitment to social and economic justice for all will find fertile soil elsewhere.

I am forwarding a copy of this letter to the Political Leader of the Party and ask that you do the same in respect of members of the Party's Executive Committee. I am also sending a copy to our regional and international friends and fraternal organisations in order that they may redirect their future messages to the appropriate person. And since the matter of my standing down from the post of General Secretary is of public interest, I am sending a copy to the media.

William Para Rivière:

1<sup>st</sup> January 2006.